



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,  
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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## WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL.

THE first Exhibition had not been opened, the Duke of Wellington was still alive, the postage stamps had no perforation round them, the Crimean War was in the future, and a certain old Cathedral Close was in its usual peaceful atmosphere of cultured leisure and self-supporting, if somewhat exclusive sociability.

The first picture that comes before my mind's eye is of three tired weary children, dirty and thirsty and cross from a long journey, being welcomed to a warm bright "homey" room by gentle voices and tender loving hands, while the busy little eyes wandered over the surroundings which were to be some of the dearest memories of a singularly happy life.

Soon I settled down in that old Cathedral Close (my brothers returning to our parents to share my father's military wanderings), and as there were few children amongst our special friends, people may think I had a lonely life; but the exceeding tenderness with which my childhood was fenced round in my home, and the kindness of everybody in the dear old Close, leave in my memory nothing to be desired. I never remember feeling the want of companionship, though as an older child I thoroughly enjoyed visits to and from large families of cousins. I don't know whether it was altogether good for me to have no "rough and tumble" intercourse with other children; and I am tolerably sure that at one time of my life I must have been an intolerable prig to those of my own age, but my up-bringing differed so essentially from the formal routine of my grandmother's time on the one hand, and the free and easy "camaraderie" of the children of my juniors on the other, that it may interest the readers of the *Parents' Review* to hear a little about it.

I was not a nursery child. My aunts (my father's sisters) were, without exception, the "finest ladies" I have ever known, and I believe they rather gloried in the absence of wealth, which obliged them to do more for me than most of our friends did for their children, and I was almost constantly with them. One of my earliest recollections is the waking

up in what I thought was the middle of the night and seeing one of them being dressed for some evening party, and the intense pride with which I convinced myself that nobody else ever could or would look so grand. I should say that loyalty to Queen, Country, Church, and family traditions, was the quality which most interpenetrated my young life. I had very little direct religious instruction, but as my aunts' religion was not a part of their life, but their very life itself, I could not fail to imbibe some of their continual realisation of God as a most loving Father, constantly present with and watching over His children.

I don't remember many childish stories and fairy tales, but while I was playing about unobserved, I listened more or less consciously to the standard books of which no doubt I understood little or nothing, but of which pieces sometimes come back to me even now, with the sound of the cultivated voice and the refined expression which seem to be lost arts. Probably elocution is more universally taught now than at any time since the days of ancient Greece, but I sorrowfully confess that I know no woman of my own age whose reading can in any way compare with that of many of an older generation.

The rules of my childhood were very few, but those few were adamant, and except in the thoroughly naughty fits, to which alas I frequently gave way, it never occurred to me to question their wisdom or their force.

In an article like this it is difficult to describe the atmosphere in which I lived, happy, merry (beyond the merriment of most children nowadays it seems to me), unself-conscious, and yet continually surrounded by a sort of "noblesse oblige," which made one proud to serve one's elders by opening a door, or fetching a footstool, or standing patiently by a visitor till he or she had time to speak to me (in my wildest moods I don't think I should have interrupted a conversation), and equally proud to say something I had learned by heart to some of the old pensioners who came for their Christmas dinners; or to put my head under the hand of one of the inmates of the Blind Institution, who liked to "see" (as she called it) how "little Miss" had grown. Animals filled up any spaces which the dearth of children might have left, and it is an endless amusement to my own



little daughter to hear about mother's dogs when she was a little girl. We had a tame robin, who built in the old ivy-covered wall of our little garden, and I used to be lifted up to see the eggs, and a little later on to watch the wide, greedy yellow beaks of the young birds stretched to their uttermost for the expected worm. We had no horses of our own, but when I was about four we were staying away, and somehow I escaped while the elders were at dinner and the other children were being put to bed, and I coaxed an old pony to the side of the paddock, scrambled on to his back, without saddle or bridle, and thoroughly enjoyed a ride, to the horror of my aunts, who saw me from the dining-room window.

A few years later we were in Devonshire and had gone to spend the day with a lady who possessed a very handsome, but very savage, dog, so savage that he was fed at the end of a pitchfork. My own impression is that I had been forbidden to go near him, but anyhow, when luncheon time came I was not to be found, and at last I was discovered sitting in this dog's kennel on the best and most familiar of terms with him; and there I had to be left till I was inclined to come out, for they feared he would attack me if they approached. I often wonder what became of that poor old misunderstood Diogenes. Of punishments I had very few, but the few which had a salutary effect upon me owed their efficacy to the suffering they evidently caused to my aunts who inflicted them, not the least to any pain to myself.

The loyalty which I felt for my aunts did not, I regret to say, extend to my governesses, at least, not to one of them, whose kindness I fully and penitently acknowledge, but who, unfortunately, had been taught never to acknowledge her own ignorance to her pupil, so that, having once found her unreliable, I delighted in setting traps for her to tumble into, by asking questions on some out of the way branch of knowledge, of which I had picked up a smattering by desultory and omnivorous reading, or by listening to the conversation of my elders and betters in the drawing-room. I am sure that all teachers (and parents, too) would gain a far deeper and more certain hold upon the respect and affection of their pupils if they would say fearlessly, "I don't know," instead of temporising or pretending.

I had the blindest faith in my aunts' knowledge, and we have often laughed over my bold assertion that "Aunt knew Greek quite well." This was certainly from no assumption of learning on their part, for they were most unaffectedly humble, but there was a certain culture about their conversation and that of their habitual visitors, which is indescribable in these days, in spite of exact knowledge and systematic cramming.

I was taught to ride, drive, skate, row, etc., as early as possible, and I was an inveterate "tom-boy," so that my father used to talk of me as "my second son," but it never occurred to myself or to anybody else that I might shirk the drudgery of learning to do needlework as well as possible, and during Lent I had to do a certain quantity daily for some charity.

Children have fixed ideas very early in life. I was only five when I remember the pride and delight of being allowed to pour out a dose of medicine, and when, more than five and twenty years afterwards, I was able to order my own life, I fulfilled part of my ideal and went into training as a nurse.

When I was eight years old we went abroad for the first time, and the first night I cried myself to sleep with the fear of being out of our own dear Queen's dominions, though I speedily recovered my spirits and picked up enough French to chatter to anyone who would listen.

We were at Boulogne at the time of the annual fair when the fishing fleet is blessed by the Archbishop, and I shall never forget the reverent impression which the procession and the benediction made upon me. One of my aunt's most stringent home rules was that religious differences should never be discussed before me, so I knew nothing of the tawdriness or the superstition of the function, but only felt the blessedness of the blessing of God's minister, and the simple faith of the fishermen, their wives, and little children.

The Catholic toleration in which I was brought up was the very opposite of the state of things described in a recent article in the *Spectator*, which speaks of the anxiety of one sect to convert another sect to itself now-a-days, and the comparative apathy about leading the godless to God.

I have good reason to know now that the parish priest of my childhood left much to be desired, but I never remember



one adverse criticism passing my aunts' lips about him or his exceedingly lax services, and I can hear their gently repressive, "My dear, he is a clergyman," when another niece spoke slightly of a rector in our neighbourhood.

Political feeling still ran high enough in our family to limit our dealing as far as possible with tradesmen of our own party, and so thoroughly was I imbued with its righteousness that I gravely asked (being about twelve) whether it was right for Miss So-and-so to have married a man on the other side. Many years before, my grandfather and a neighbouring squire had had a hand-to-hand fight over the possession of an unfortunate voter, who held land under them both, and who was being conveyed to the polling booth in one of my grandfather's waggons, having been previously decorated with the colours of our party, and though I afterwards knew the son of my grandfather's opponent as a most kindly courteous gentleman, I never lost the impression of his family being of a dangerous and pernicious class.

A few events stand out clearly in my remembrance of when I was a little girl—the thrilling interest of the Crimean war, the peace rejoicing after it; my first visit to the Tower and Westminster Abbey, the standing up beside General Tom Thumb, and the proud impression of looking down on him, the Indian Mutiny, and especially the welcoming a V.C. cousin with his "honours thick upon him;" the hearing of an oratorio for the first time when Jenny Lind thrilled even my childish heart (for I was only eleven) with her superb rendering of "On mighty pens," which no subsequent singing has effaced, my first Shakespeare play, in which Kate Terry forgot herself and made everyone forget her in her impersonation of Beatrice; my first visit to Kew, whose kindly curator was known to my Aunts, &c., &c.; but the greater part of my early life is full of the indefinable all-pervading influence of those stately loving and beloved ones who, like the "barren" woman of the bible, had "many more children than she which hath an husband," to whom I could take my childish joys and sorrows with the certainty that they would be sympathised with, perhaps laughed over openly and merrily, but always understood.

G. G. F.

## EDITORIAL.

### SHOW CAUSE WHY.

WE have been asking, WHY? like Mr. Ward Fowler's Wagtail, for a long time. We asked, Why? about linen underclothing, and behold it is discarded. We asked Why? about numberless petticoats, and they are going. We are asking, Why? about carpets and easy chairs, and all manner of luxurious living; and probably the year 1900 will see none of these things save the survivals. It is as well we should go about with this practical Why? rather than with the "Why does a wagtail wag its tail?" manner of problem. The latter issues in vain guesses, and the pseudo-knowledge which puffeth up—But if, Why? leads us to—"Because we should not; then, let us do the thing we should." This manner of Why? is like a poker to a dying fire.

Why is Tom Jones sent to school? That he may be educated, of course, say his parents. And Tom is dismissed with the fervent hope that he may take a good place. But never a word about the delights of learning, or of the glorious worlds of nature and of thought to which his school studies will presumably prove an open sesame. "Mind you be a good boy and get a good place in your class," is Tom's valediction; and his little soul quickens with purpose. He won't disappoint father, and mother shall be proud of him. He'll be the top boy in his class. Why, he'll be the top boy in the whole school, and get prizes and things, and won't that be jolly! Tommy says nothing of this, but his mother sees it in his eyes and blesses the manly little fellow. So Tommy goes to school, happy boy, freighted with his father's hopes and his mother's blessings. By and by comes a report, the main delight of which is, that Tommy has gained six places; more places gained, prizes, removes—by and by scholarships. Before he is twelve, Tommy is able to earn the whole of his future schooling by his skill in that industry of the young popularly known as *Exams*. Now he aims at larger game, "exams" still, but "exams" big with possibilities, "exams" which will carry him through his University career. His success is pretty certain, because